Making It Happen: Training Mechanized Infantry Companies

Subject Area Training

EWS 2006

MAKING IT HAPPEN: TRAINING MECHANIZED INFANTRY COMPANIES

Final Draft

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7 February 2006

Report Documentation Page

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

1. REPORT DATE	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED
07 FEB 2006		**00-00-2006 to 00-00-2006**

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE	5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
Making It Happen: Training Mechanized Infantry Companies	5b. GRANT NUMBER
	5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
6. AUTHOR(S)	5d. PROJECT NUMBER
	5e. TASK NUMBER
	5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) **United States Marine Corps,Command and Staff College, Marine Corps Combat Development,Marine Corps University, 2076 South Street,Quantico,VA,22134-5068**	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
	11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Approved for public release; distribution unlimited

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT

15. SUBJECT TERMS

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT **unclassified**	b. ABSTRACT **unclassified**	c. THIS PAGE **unclassified**	**Same as Report (SAR)**	**12**	

The requirement for the Marine Corps to conduct mechanized operations is higher now than at any other time in the history of the Corps. While the infantry and amphibious assault vehicle (AAV) team continues to get the job done, all is not well. Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) revealed shortcomings in the current ad-hoc nature of Marine mechanized infantry, especially between infantry companies and AAV platoons. While the Marine Corps has sought to alleviate dissension over the employment of AAVs, no amount doctrine will completely eliminate the potential for friction that exists between infantry company commanders and AAV platoon commanders. The root of this problem is a lack of familiarity between infantry and AAV units that can only be solved with a new approach to training for mechanized operations. The USMC must provide mechanized operations training for infantry company officers who will operate with AAVs, and standardized collective training standards for mechanized infantry companies.

BACKGROUND: THE DOCTRINE

The Marine Corps does not maintain standing mechanized infantry units. Instead, it maintains flexible, general-purpose infantry that is able to utilize several methods of transportation, insertion, and fire support without over-emphasis on one any one form. While a sound practice, this organizing principle is a major contributor to the lack of

familiarity that exists between many infantry units and their supporting AAVs. Such friction is especially present in battalions involved in the MEU cycle as only one company in a given battalion receives any significant exposure to AAV operations. Conversely, AAV platoon commanders also do not work enough with infantry companies. The result is the development of tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) without input from the infantry that AAV units will support. The resulting gap in understanding about AAV employment between the two communities creates friction between infantry company commanders and AAV platoon commanders, as identified in a study of mechanized operations during OIF by Major Kevin A. Norton.

> "One of the most important combat lessons that arose in these mechanized infantry companies regarded tactical control exercised by the infantry and AA unit leaders. This problem manifested itself often times at the worst possible time, in contact with the enemy…[1] One school of thought is that the AA platoon commander controls the AAVs by issuing orders directly to his AA section leaders who then issue orders to the individual vehicle commanders (VCs). These orders are based in supporting the infantry company commander's scheme of maneuver and intent. The other school of thought is that the infantry company commander issues orders during mechanized operations, directly to the infantry platoon commanders, who then issue orders to the infantry squad leaders (troop commanders) who ultimately direct individual vehicles into position on the battlefield."[2]

The USMC attempted to resolve the issue of control over supporting vehicles through doctrine. The Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-13 stated that "The rifle company

[1] Major Kevin A. Norton, "Unnecessary Friction Inside the Marine Corps' Mechanized Infantry Companies" (Master of Military Studies Thesis, USMC Command and Staff College, 2005), 1.
[2] Norton, "Unnecessary Friction Inside the Marine Corps' Mechanized Infantry Companies," 3.

commander exercises maneuver control of his company through the AA platoon commander."[3] While he may delegate control to the AAV platoon commander, the ultimate control over vehicles in tactical situations rests with the infantry company commander. However, there are obstacles to employing this doctrine. Not all infantry officers have the same level of experience, especially if they spent their earlier careers in a helicopter or boat company. To put an infantry commander in this position is a disservice to him and the AAV platoon that will support him.

MECHANIZED INFANTRY TRAINING FOR INFANTRY COMPANY OFFICERS

Another issue raised in Major Norton's research is the perception by AAV officers that many infantry officers lack knowledge of mechanized operations[4]. While this is not universally true, and not an excuse for an AAV lieutenant to be dismissive with any infantry officer, many infantry officers do have limited exposure to AAVs. The mechanized training at IOC, while expanded to include practical application at Twenty-Nine Palms, is limited due to other commitments. As a result many infantry officers do not gain a full appreciation for mechanized operations until a MEU training cycle or operational commitments

[3] United States Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-13, Employment of Amphibious Assault Vehicles (Change 1*), Washington D.C.: Headquarters USMC, 3.
[4] "The unspoken basis of debate lies with the infantry leaders presumed lack of familiarity of the capabilities and limitations of the AAVs." Norton, "Unnecessary Friction Inside the Marine Corps' Mechanized Infantry Companies," 19.

that require them to work with AAVs. In addition, not all company commanders have experience with AAVs unless they were part of the designated mechanized company during a previous tour in the operating forces. This limited exposure can lead to misunderstandings about AAV employment and lead to friction with the supporting AAV officer. While any such issues are easily overcome in a 180 day workup cycle for a MEU deployment, situations that require less time can be more problematic.

Consequently, a mechanized operations training program for infantry company officers, prior to working with AAVs, would help solve the problem of limited exposure. This course would have a set curriculum approved by the infantry and AAV communities. Attendance of all officers in the mechanized company, to include the AAV officer would be mandatory, but an option would exist to include senior enlisted members as well. The course would also be flexible enough to include multiple mechanized company staffs for an entire mechanized infantry battalion. The course could be administered by a team from AAS Battalion or either of the Assault Amphibian Battalions locally, at Camp LeJeune or Camp Pendleton.

The Mechanized Leaders Course would open with an introduction to the characteristics and capabilities of the AAV in its various configurations, and the organization of AAV units. This would be followed by courses on planning and

conduct of the various types of missions with which a mechanized company could be tasked. Mission planning instruction could be tailored to the type of operations envisioned. For example, a company preparing for a MEU deployment would focus on special operations, such as mechanized raids, while a unit bound for Iraq could emphasize mechanized patrolling and urban operations. Finally, the options for support and command relationships would be covered, clearly laying out the options open to the infantry company commander in his tasking of the AAV platoon commander. The attendance by infantry and AAV unit leaders will build camaraderie and teamwork before either board an AAV. Such an arrangement would be especially helpful if operational commitments make training impossible (i.e., the linkup of 1st Marines with AAVs 96 hours prior to attacking in OIF)[5]. The curriculum of a mechanized company training course could fit in a five-day block per figure 1 below.

SAMPLE UNIT LEADER TRAINING SCHEDULE (Figure 1)

DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5
Introduction -AAV unit capabilites -Command relationship -Types of support (DS, GS)	**Offense** -Movement to contact -Deliberate Attacks -Battle Drills -Movment security concerns	**MOUT and Defense** -Urban AAV infantry/AAV operations Deliberate and hasty defense	**Special and Amphibious Operations** -Amhpibious assaults -Riverine operations -MOOTW	**Logistics** -Refuel and replenishment of the mech company -Maintenance

[5] Norton, "Unnecessary Friction Inside the Marine Corps' Mechanized Infantry Companies," 9.

COLLECTIVE TRAINING STANDARDS FOR MECHANIZED COMPANIES

No amount of doctrine, TTPs, or other devices can guarantee mission capability like evaluated training. Even unit leader training is a limited answer. Frequent joint training between infantry and AAV units is the key component in creating an effective mechanized team. With the exception of operational considerations, no mechanized company team should deploy without extensive training together. However, infantry companies, especially those not involved with a MEU, have limited opportunity to work with AAV platoons. The training that does occur is an ad-hoc affair. It is dependent upon the AAV unit and supported infantry unit, rather than standardized collective training standards upon which both communities agree.

The lack of a standardized training for a mechanized company team even extends to designated mechanized companies in MEU battalions. In conversations with AAV officers who deployed with a MEU, special operations capable (SOC) qualifications did not include missions for the mechanized company.[6] During the author's training for deployment, no outside agency evaluated the mechanized company, and no formal training standards were

[6] Captain Brian Strack and Captain Tim Hough, verbal discussion with author, September 2005. Both deployed as part of a MEU (from LeJeuane and one from Pendleton). MEU exercises and SOC qualifications did not include mechanized operations.

ever put forward as goals from an agency outside of the company.[7] For an infantry company that has never worked with AAVs before, the lack of evaluated training standards is even more crippling. With little experience to judge what needs to be done, training may not prepare the infantry and AAV platoon to work together. The result is friction similar to that experienced in OIF between infantry companies and AAV platoons. This lack of formal evaluation of mechanized company readiness points to the need for standardized evaluation criteria.

The old adage, inspect what you expect has particular resonance in the realm of mechanized operations. Both the infantry and AAV communities have training and readiness (T&R) manuals for individual and collective unit skills, but they lack such a device for joint mechanized training. A mechanized infantry company T&R manual would provide collective training standards for the AAV and infantry company team. The Mechanized Company Team T&R manual would provide two key components to enhance mechanized team training. First, the manual would provide collective training standards, allowing focus for training. The infantry company and AAV platoon would already know what standards they must meet. This will help provide a training focus for mechanized operations, even when the two

[7] Author deployed with BLT 2/5 as part of 31st MEU (SOC) from July-Dec 2001. The only formal training conducted prior to deployment was the SOTG Mechanized raid course and CAX. All other training was organized between the author's platoon and the supported infantry company.

units cannot train together due to other requirements. Second, it would serve as a reference for those evaluating the effectiveness of a mechanized company based on the ability to achieve selected training standards.

The collective training standards (CTS) would be derived from real-world missions assigned to a mechanized infantry company. The standards would be arranged into broad categories of conventional, special operations, and military operations other than war (MOOTW), and general. The CTS would provide tasks for the mechanized company and individual mechanized infantry platoons. Individual and other standards below this level would be covered in the infantry and AAV T&R manuals. The figure below provides examples of possible training standards for each category.

SAMPLE COLLECTIVE TRAINING STANDARDS (Figure 2)

CATEGORY	EXAMPLE STANDARDS
Conventional	1. Conduct a movement to contact 2. Conduct a hammerhead battle drill (1 mech platoon action left or right) 3. Set up a company battle position, integrating AAVs into defensive scheme of maneuver 3. Conduct mechanized patrols in urban terrain
Special Operations	1. Conduct a mechanized company raid 2. Conduct a mechanized NEO 3. Conduct a mechanized TRAP
MOOTW	1. Provide security for an aid distribution site 2. Provide convoy security
General	1. Conduct a service station refueling 2. Conduct AAV recovery and towing operations 3. Create and demonstrate a downed vehicle and bump plan

The evaluated standards could be tailored to the expected mission profiles of the mechanized company. For example, a mechanized company deploying as part of MEU could focus more heavily on tasks set forth under the special operations category. A unit deploying to Iraq could focus on conventional operations. Thus, a mechanized company with a limited training window could focus on tasks that are more likely, without being evaluated on every CTS in the manual.

Other than the cost to create and print the new manuals, additional costs in personnel or limited training time would be limited. The evaluation of a mechanized company would be based on observation of selected training standards from the T&R manual. This means that no specially trained evaluation teams are required. The evaluators would consist of a joint evaluation team from the infantry battalion or regiment (providing the infantry company) and from the AAV company or battalion (providing the AAV platoon). With respect to actual training events, many existing exercises and training opportunities can be used the conduct the evaluation of mechanized training standards. For example, CAX could be used to evaluate standards such as the conduct of a deliberate attack and numerous logistical operations. The evaluation team could also seek additional input and critiques from the existing TTECG

staff. For MEU mechanized companies, evaluation of CTS could take place during existing training for mechanized raids. In addition, the evaluation team could remind the MEU and BLT commanders to develop and conduct mechanized operations for training purposes.

CONCLUSION

Friction between AAV platoon commanders and infantry company commanders can hurt the ability of the mechanized infantry company to accomplish the mission. The solution lies in a new approach to training mechanized infantry companies. A training course for infantry company officers prior to working with AAVs would ensure infantry leaders were aware of the myriad of issues that come along with AAVs. A mechanized company T&R manual would focus the training of the AAV platoon and infantry company before and during joint training. Both of these measures can be enacted with existing personnel, and evaluations of most CTS can take place during training events that already occur. With Iraq and the future employment of the EFV, mechanized operations are not going away. Without a new training regimen for mechanized company teams, the problems encountered between AAV platoons and infantry companies will not go away either.

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